Castlemaine Naturalist

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Monthly newsletter of the Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.

Blue Caladenia – photo Peter Turner, Rise & Shine

Excursion to Rise and Shine NCR

Peter Turner

Twelve members enjoyed a slow walk around the three km. circuit at the Rise & Shine Nature Conservation Reserve on Saturday 9th September. There were many birds to try to identify against the grey skies, and a few orchids and other wildflowers to pore over and photograph . The Parks Vic. leaflet available at the entrance provides information about 21 numbered sites along the track. The reserve protects what remains of an ancient river bed that left coarse sedimentary, gravelly rock – and some gold - spread across the underlying Ordovician bedrock. Three types of vegetation are found: "Heathy Woodland", "Box Ironbark Forest", and "Alluvial Terraces Herb-rich Woodland", which together provide nurture for the large number of bird and plant species recorded at the reserve. In addition to the inevitable damage from early gold mining, the more recent history of gravel extraction until the 1980's had a devastating impact on a substantial part of the Heathy Woodland area. Despite these impacts, the wide range of plants and birds make visits to the "Rise & Shine" very worthwhile.

Bird list for CFNC Excursion 9th September 2017 - Rise & Shine Nature Conservation Reserve

Australasian Grebe	Fuscous Honeyeater
Wedge-tailed Eagle	White-plumed Honeyeater
Little Eagle	Red Wattlebird
Galah	Black-chinned Honeyeater
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	Brown-headed Honeyeater
Crimson Rosella	White-naped Honeyeater
Eastern Rosella	Grey Shrike-thrush
Horsfield's Bronze-cuckoo (h)	Olive-backed Oriole (h)
Pallid Cuckoo (h)	Australian Magpie
Laughing Kookaburra	Grey Fantail
Brown Treecreeper	Willie Wagtail
Superb Fairy-wren	Australian Raven
White-browed Scrubwren	Magpie-lark
Yellow Thornbill	White-winged Chough
Spotted Pardalote	Jacky Winter (h)
Striated Pardalote	Welcome Swallow
Yellow-tufted Honeyeater	Common Blackbird

Plant list by Richard Piesse

Over 60 indigenous plants were identified, and plants in flower at the Rise and Shine N.C.R. On Sept 9 included:

Wurmbea dioica	Early Nancy
Hypoxis glabella	Tiny Star
Moraea fugacissima	Yellow Galaxia #
Caladenia carnea	Pink Fingers
Caladenia fuscata	Dusky Fingers
Cyanicula caerulea	Blue Caladenia
Pterostylis nana	Dwarf Greenhood
Cassinia arcuata	Coffee bush
Microseris lanceolata	Yam Daisy
Xerochrysum viscosum	Sticky Everlasting
Hardenbergia violacea	Purple Coral-pea
Acacia acinacea	Gold dust Wattle
Acacia baileyana	Cootamundra Wattle #
Acacia paradoxa	Hedge Wattle
Acacia pycnantha	Golden Wattle
Eucalyptus leucoxylon	Yellow Gum
Oxalis purpurea	Large-flowered Wood-sorrel #
Grevillea alpina	Downy Grevillea

plus two Juncus species

introduced to the Castlemaine bush

Wednesday Wildflower Wander September 20

Geraldine Harris – the Pipeline track

The bush off the pipeline track was very dry for so early in the season yet we managed a reasonable list of flowering plants. The highlights were the many White Marianth (*Rhytidosporum procumbens*) and the colonies of Dwarf Greenhoods (*Pterostylis nana*) and Small Gnat orchids (*Cyrtostylis reniformis*). Both of these orchids are tiny but once you hone your eye they become quite easy to spot.

Small gnat orchids are easily identified by their ground-hugging grey-green leaves with pale “tessellated” style veins and their long maroon tongue-like labellum. The shape of the leaf is roughly heart-shaped but it can be quite variable so is not a reliable identifier. These orchids are thought to be pollinated by gnats and other small flies and reward their pollinators with nectar that runs down the labellum from the glands at the base, enticing the insect to follow the trail to the base of the curved column. The column wings align the insect and the pollinia stick to its thorax as it feeds. (Enid Mayfield, Flora of the Otway Plains and Ranges 1)

We returned to our cars along the Pipeline track in order to view the remains of the old Maldon pipeline. This extract from a piece by John Romeril gives some background to the pipeline -

> *Back in the 1870s the Coliban scheme developed as a series of open channels, aqueducts, siphons and tunnels. Gravity was exploited to carry water from the Coliban at Malmsbury north to Castlemaine and Bendigo; and, for a time, to Maldon. Much of this ambitious system remains in service but from the outset it was problem-plagued. Unforeseen leakage and siltation and the inefficiency of the catchment areas along its length so compromised the quantity and quality of the water it delivered that voters have been regularly up in arms during its 130-plus year history.*
>
> *Like a malfunctioning appendix, one of the "technological fixes" attempted along the way, a timber pipeline laid 1914 from Barkers Creek to Maldon, was decommissioned in the 1970s. Overnight the easement giving maintenance workers access to the plumbing became surplus to State Rivers and Water Supply Commission's needs. The excised ribbon of land reverted to a string of title-holders; thus my title, "Now I own the pipeline”.*

Acacia acinacea	Gold-dust Wattle
Acacia aspera	Rough wattle
Acacia gunnii	Ploughshare Wattle
Acacia pycnantha	Golden Wattle
Acrotriche serrulata	Honey-pots n/f
Brachyloma daphnoides	Daphne Heath
Caladenia carnea	Pink Fingers
Cassinia arcuata	Coffee Bush n/f
Craspedia variabilis	Billy-buttons
Cyanicula caerulea	Blue Caladenia
Cyrtostylis reniformis	Small Gnat Orchid
Daviesia ulicifolia	Gorse Bitter-pea
Diuris pardina	Leopard Orchid

Fairy Wax-flower - photo N Y

Drosera auriculata	Tall Sundew
Grevillea dryophylla	Goldfields Grevillea
Hovea heterophylla	Common Hovea
Lazula meridionalis v *densiflora*	Common Woodrush
Microseris sp	Yam Daisy
Ozothamnus obcordatus	Grey Everlasting
Philotheca verrucosa	Fairy Wax-flower
Pimelea sp.	Rice-flower
Pterostylis nana	Dwarf Greenhood
Pterostylis nutans	Nodding Greenhood
Rhytidosporum procumbens	White Marianth
Senecio sp	Fireweed
Stackhousia monogyna	Creamy Candles
Tetratheca ciliata	Pink Bells
Wurmbea dioica	Early Nancy
Xerochrysum viscosum	Sticky Everlasting

Goldfields Grevillea

- photo Noel Young

Wednesday Wildflower Wander September 27

List by Richard Piesse – Kalimna Park

Wurmbea dioica	Early Nancy
Hypoxis glabella	Tiny Star
Caladenia carnea	Pink Fingers
Diuris pardina	Leopard Orchid
Glossodia major	Waxlip Orchid
Craspedia variabilis	Billy-buttons
Microseris lanceolata	Yam Daisy
Stackhousia monogyna	Creamy Candles
Drosera macrantha	Climbing Sundew
Drosera auriculata	Tall Sundew
Tetratheca ciliata	Pink Bells
Acacia acinacea	Gold-dust Wattle
Acacia aspera	Rough wattle
Acacia genistifolia	Spreading Wattle
Acacia paradoxa	Hedge Wattle
Acacia pycnantha	Golden Wattle
Daviesia ulicifolia	Gorse Bitter-pea
Daviesia leptophylla	Narrow-leaf Bitter-pea
Hardenbergia violacea	Purple Coral-pea
Goodenia blackiana	Black's Goodenia
Gonocarpus tetragynus	Common Raspwort
Prostanthera denticulata	Rough Mint-bush
Oxalis perennans	Grassland Wood-sorrel
Rhytidosporum procumbens	White Marianth
Grevillea alpina	Downy Grevillea
Philotheca verrucosa	Fairy Wax-flower
Pimelea linifolia	Slender Rice-flower

Hundreds of Leopard Orchids were in flower at Kalimna

- photo Noel Young

The loss of Silver Banksia across Western Victoria

Peter Turner

Simon Heyes, Land Manager for City of Brimbank, gave a stimulating talk at the September General Meeting on the decline in Silver Banksia *(Banksia marginata)* woodlands across Western Victoria – the topic of Simon's MSc studies at Latrobe University. Early records show that these small trees were widespread across the Western Plains, but their numbers declined during the 1840s and by 1886 the *Hamilton Spectator* reported that the Silver Banksia woodlands had gone. Today individual trees are mainly found along some roadsides and railway reserves.

In his *"Wild Plants of the Castlemaine District",* Ern Perkins wrote of Silver Banksia: *"Probably now extinct in the Castlemaine district. Planted non-local species are moderately common. In the 1980s there were Silver Banksias near Metcalfe, on the east side of Mt Alexander, and on some of the hills north of Mt Alexander. All of these are now dead…… Early records indicate that Silver Banksias were abundant on the grassy plains of Victoria. The common name then used was Honeysuckle."*

Silver Banksia occurs in both tree form and as a shrub; the latter is seratinous – killed by fire, with regeneration through seeds released from the cones after fire – and tends to be found on phosphorous-poor soils. The non-seratinous tree form is more tolerant of soil type, and can regrow after fire from lignotubers, as well as from seed. Simon's research is focused on an apparent recruitment "bottleneck": the failure of new *Banksia marginata* to replace old ones along the roadways and other sites where they are still found in Western Victoria. He is studying regrowth – or lack of it – at about 6 sites. It appears likely that three factors may be limiting regeneration: Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos seek out Silver Banksia cones as a favoured food; unsuitable fire risk reduction burns along roadsides and other sites; and rabbits eating new growth. Pollination by birds and small mammals may be a factor, due to loss of connected habitat.

A most interesting story, with further insights to follow, no doubt, as Simon's research continues. Can the "Banksia Team" at Latrobe Uni find ways to enable better natural regeneration of this splendid species, once so widespread?

Report on plant surveys

Richard Piesse

Since the last week in August, Lesley Perkins, Evan Moore and I have been out in Kalimna Park with Matt Chick, senior Biodiversity Officer with DELWP doing plant surveys in some of the quadrats Ern and Lesley initiated in 2009. (one in 2006)

Since our last visits in 2012 and 2013, the drought conditions have been changed by last year's winter – early spring rains and the great rains of April this year.

Where most of the trees and shrubs were seriously stressed, most of them are now looking healthy, and thousands of small seedlings are growing everywhere, e.g., in one quadrat our estimate for Grey Everlasting seedlings would be between 1500 and 2000!

Many wildflowers are colouring our wonderful bush, but many bulbs and orchids may not flower this spring because the winter months have been so dry.

Photo Observations

Noel Young – Castlemaine Spider orchids *Caladenia clavescens* at The Monk September 26th

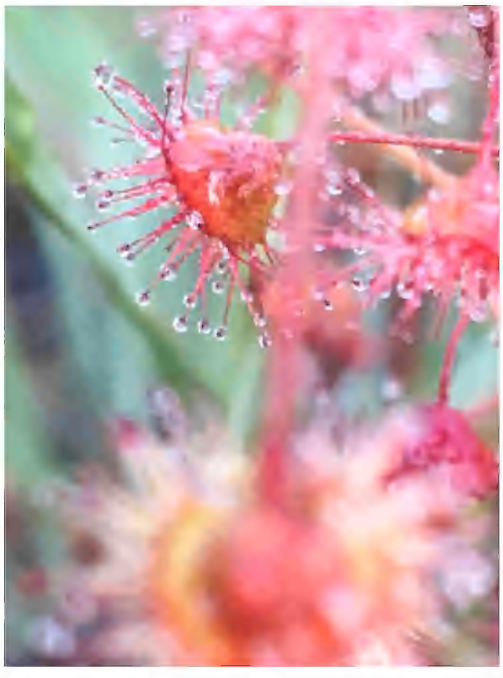
Trace Balla – Kalimna Park in Late August

These frosty mornings have been such a treat. Walking through Kalimna park I have taken these photos this week. I also saw two wallabies together a couple of days, a pair of nesting bronzewings, a fantailed cuckoo feasting on a worm and singing its beautiful song, and many emerald-lipped Greenhoods.

I am currently working on a children's book set in this area, with the assistance of local ecologists including Karl Just, and Dja Dja Wurrung elder Uncle Rick Nelson. Last week my book "Rockhopping" won the children's Book Council Of Australia younger readers book of the year, which means schools all around the country will have this book for kids to read. It is wonderful they are awarding a book that is about caring for country. It is set in Gariwerd, the Grampians, and follows the story of a boy and his bird watching Uncle on their adventures to find the source of the Glenelg river. The previous book "Rivertime", is about their ten day paddling trip along that river, and won the wilderness society, and Readings children's book of the year awards. These books are available from Stonemans.

If anyone has any good stories about the golden whistler or the bibrons toad I would love to hear from you (email below) as they feature in my next book. If you see me sketching in the forest, come and say hello!

traceballa@yahoo.com



The Kara Kara Conservation Management Network presents:

'Gardening for Wildlife' Seminar

When: Sunday, 22nd October 2017, from 12 noon

Where: McDonald Hall, Town Hall Complex, Napier Street, St Arnaud

Come along and hear expert speakers discuss how to create habitat for native wildlife in your home garden.

Entry is FREE and includes a light lunch. RSVPs required by Tuesday 17th October 2017 for catering purposes. Call Deb on 0419 550 226 or email karakaracmn@gmail.com.

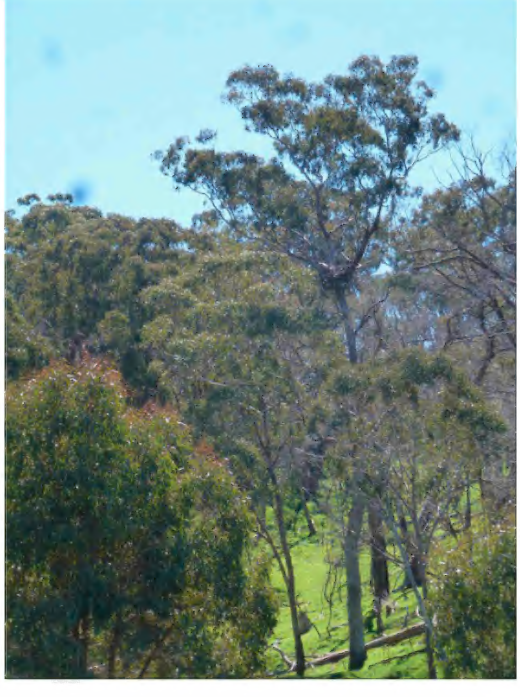
Geraldine Harris - Wedge-tailed Eagle nest with two young

On Saturday September 23rd we went to test the wind on the hill on the day of our bonfire. As we got to the top of the hill we noticed a wedge-tailed eagle being attacked by magpies and we watched as it dropped something from on high and then flew off north high over the bush paddock. As we went down to investigate we looked up toward the bush and were delighted to see a huge nest high in up in a tree with something white moving about in it. We had formerly only known of an old unused eagles nest in this valley so it was an exciting find.

The dropped item was a small animal body about the size of a small rabbit - the head and the tail had been removed and the body almost entirely plucked of fur, the feet suggested it was a possum and the fur around the feet was ginger coloured which indicated it might have been a young ring tail possum fully prepared for the young eagle to eat. We took a few photos and left hoping the adult would return for his prey which must have taken some time to prepare.

26/9/17 I sat for 3/4 hour watching the nest with binoculars and saw one young lift its head and move about into a new position. while I was watching the nest I saw magpies attacking an adult Wedge-tailed Eagle high overhead.

27/9/17 Two adult birds tending the young at the nest moved off after a Whistling Kite flew overhead.



Observations

At the September meeting: Several reports of Cuckoos and Orioles calling.

- Peter had seen a Powerful Owl in the botanical gardens, and speculated that it could have a mate on the nest in the vicinity like last year
- 26th September; Noel heard four Cuckoo species calling while on the Monk – Pallid, Fan-tailed, Shining Bronze-cuckoo and Horsefield's.
- 2nd October; A lone Powerful Owl in the usual Stone Pine in the gardens – Noel.

Challenge Count for the Castlemaine District – An Annual Birdwatching Adventure

By Chris Timewell

For many years, Chris Morris has coordinated the Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club to have a team participant in Birdlife Australia's annual Challenge Count. At the insistence of Birdlife, this always takes place on the first weekend in December – which is not a convenient time of the year with so many other competing end-of-year activities. Nor is it particularly brilliant for birdwatching in central Victoria. However, it's the same date for all teams from across the country. It has also been the same weekend for many years, which allows a good comparison with the results from previous participations.

The aim for each team is to document as many bird species as possible, and also numbers of individuals, within a 25km radius of a central point within a single calendar day. Whether a species is actively breeding (e.g. sitting on nest, feeding nestlings, taking food to a hollow) is also documented. For a bird to be officially recorded on the team list, it must be accurately identified by at least two people by sight or by at least three people if it is heard only.

In 2016, Castlemaine's overall team was made up of 5 separate groups which mostly ranged in size from three to five people, but with one group organised by Connecting Country containing more than 15. There is no maximum group size, but having at least three is very helpful. The five groups were dispersed in all directions across the district. Elsewhere there were 5 urban teams from greater Melbourne, 15 other country Victorian teams, seven NSW teams and three Queensland teams.

Castlemaine's 2016 result of 84 bird species and 1,212 individuals was the lowest since 2011. A drop in bird numbers in 2016 compared to 2015 seems to have been a reasonably common trend for teams all across Victoria and Australia, but worrying for the Castlemaine area nonetheless. Our effort seems to have been similar to previous years. Among the Victorian teams, the most number of species were recorded in Bairnsdale (161), Ballarat (143) and Horsham (143). Townsville had the highest number of species recorded in other states (178).

All of the bird species recorded by Castlemaine teams were recorded by at least one other country Victorian team. However, notably among country Victorian teams, Castlemaine had both the highest number of Pink-eared Ducks (12) and Powerful Owls (2) and it was the only location with these species recorded as breeding; we had one of only two sightings of Australian Owlet-nightjar, the highest number of Little Eagles (3); and the only breeding observations of Jacky Winter and Rainbow Bee-eaters.

The results from the Castlemaine going back to 2011 are summarised in the first table. (Many earlier years are not recorded here). The summary of results from across the country during the 2016 Challenge Count only is provided in the second table.

Many thanks to Chris 'Kit' Morris for coordinating the CFNC Challenge Count team for so many years. It is a role that I am excited to be taking on for 2017. I have big shoes to fill – and I greatly appreciate the advice and support that Kit has given me

thus far. In coming newsletters and meetings I will be seeking interest from people interested in being involved on this event on 2-3 December 2017. You don't need to be a birding expert, as I can pair you with a team that has at least one specialist. It's always a lot of fun, a chance to see some different local birding hotspots and also learn a bit more about our feathered friends. For more info or to express interest in being in a team, feel free to contact me. c_timewell@hotmail.com

Table 1. Challenge Count results from the Castlemaine team over recent years

Year	# bird species	# individual birds
2011	83	1328
2012	115	3296
2013	127	2727
2014	103	1789
2015	106	2087
2016	84	1212

Table 2. Summary of 2016 Challenge Count results from across Australia

Region	# of teams	# bird species	# individual birds
Melbourne area	5	163	8,683
Vic Country	16	269	59,991
New South Wales	7	191	5,194
Queensland	3	236	13,539
TOTAL	**31**	**377**	**87,407**

Bird Quiz

Nigel Harland

The bird featured last month was the Brown-headed Honeyeater, continuing the theme set in August. It is slightly less delightful, looking a little drab compared to the White-naped. It is equally common, but easily overlooked. The eye ring completely circles the eye and this feature can distinguish it from other similar species. They are usually found in small groups, feeding high in saplings, but often frequent bird baths in the summertime.

The bird for next month is shown at left.

Our guest speaker this month is Robyn Davidson

Robyn's first book, 'Tracks', an account of her journey alone, with camels, across Australia, won several awards, and has been published in twenty languages. Since publication in 1980, it has never been out of print. She was born in Western Queensland, was educated at a boarding school in Brisbane, won scholarships including a music scholarship, but decided to forego them in order to travel. Later, she studied various subjects at Queensland University, before going to Central Australia to prepare for her journey.

She has been travelling ever since, has written a novel, 'Ancestors'; a second travel book - an account of two years spent on migration with Indian nomads, 'Desert Places'; a travel anthology for Picador; a feature film for ABC television, and many essays, including a Quarterly Essay, 'No Fixed Address' published by Blackinc. Her literary reviews, travel pieces and journalism have been published in international newspapers and magazines, including The National Geographic Magazine, Bunte, Sterne, Geo, London Sunday Times, Guardian, TLS, Granta as well as The Monthly, The Age etc. They have been collected in anthologies around the world, including Best Australian Essays. She has given lectures at the New York Public Library, the Smithsonian Institute, and the Geographical Society. Her interests are nomadism, ancient and modern, and the effects of modernity on indigenous peoples. Currently she is finishing her memoir 'Self Portrait With Imaginary Mother', to be published by Bloomsbury, the beginning chapter of which won the Blazey Award.

Invitation to Participate in the Recent Ecological Change in Australia Project

A national online survey is being conducted by the CSIRO and the Department of the Environment and Energy. The survey will help us understand how Australia's bushland and biodiversity has been changing in recent years, and whether the 1°C increase in surface temperature experienced over the past century may have contributed to these changes.

If you have a strong, long-term relationship with the land and are passionate about the future of Australia's special plants and animals then the CSIRO would love to hear from you. The survey will collect first hand observations, insights and stories about places that are changing and places that aren't changing. For example, you may have observed new species appearing, plants flowering at unusual times, or trees dying in your area. This will provide a unique and important historical record for Australia. We'd love for you to participate.

To participate, you would need to be able to select a natural area (e.g. your local region or farm, a Nature Reserve, urban bushland) that you have been familiar with for at least the last 10 years. Note that we are interested both in areas where change has been observed and where change has not been observed.

The survey would take about 30 minutes. If this has sparked your interest, additional information about the full project can be found by entering "Recent Ecological Change in Australia Project" in your search engine.

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club

Castlemaine Field Naturalists
Coming events

Fri October 13 meeting: speaker ROBYN DAVIDSON

Sat October 14 field trip: Red, White & Blue mine area

Fri November 10 meeting: speaker IAN HIGGINS – weeds, including Stipoids

Sat November 11 field trip: Stipoid weeds in the CBG with Marg Panter

Monday November 20: Roadside clean-up

Fri December 8 meeting: Members night and break-up

VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB ACTIVITIES

General meetings - (second Friday of each month, except January) are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) Hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 7.30 pm.

Field Trips - (Saturday following the general meeting) leave from the car park opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp unless stated otherwise. BYO morning and/or afternoon tea. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days.

Business meetings - third Thursday of each month, except December, at George Broadways; 24a Greenhill Ave., at 6.00 pm. Members are invited to attend.

Club website (Web master: Chris Timewell) - http://castlemainefnc.wordpress.com/

Subscriptions for 2017
Ordinary membership: Single $30, Family $40
Pensioner or student: Single $25, Family $30
Subscription includes postage of the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist

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